

VZCZCXRO3858
PP RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #1184/01 2181436
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 051436Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1520
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTJF HOA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001184

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON
NSC FOR BPITTMAN AND CHUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: BASHIR OFFERS FEW DETAILS ON DARFUR INITIATIVE TO JEM AND
SLM/MM AS THEIR FRUSTRATION INCREASES

REF: KHARTOUM 1130

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Despite showing a renewed interest in Darfur, Sudanese President Bashir has so far offered few concrete or specific ideas for solving the region's problems, say contacts from the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement of Minni Minnawi (SLM/MM). Members of both organizations criticized Bashir's current lack of outreach to JEM and SLM/MM leaders. One senior member of the SLM/MM stated that Bashir is motivated by the threat of an ICC indictment, not by a genuine desire to bring stability and peace to Darfur, while JEM contacts publicly stated that the NCP wants to keep Darfur unstable until 2011. END SUMMARY

"NO SUBSTANCE TO BASHIR'S DARFUR INITIATIVE"

¶2. (U) On August 5, the pro-government Arabic daily "Akbar Al-Youm" published a lengthy interview with the Justice and Equality Movement's Deputy Chairman, Abu Bakr Hamid, focusing on President Bashir's widely announced Darfur initiative. Like other JEM representatives (as reported in reftel) Hamid said that statements from JEM's Legislative Council President Dr. Tahir Adam Al-Faki should not be interpreted as an acceptance of Bashir's initiative. Hamid stated that JEM welcomes any peace initiative, but "regarding the Bashir initiative we do not know the details of this so it is impossible to have an opinion about it."

¶3. (U) Responding to this comment, the interviewer and editor-in-chief of the pro-regime "Akbar Al-Youm," said that Bashir clearly invited all rebel movements to participate in this initiative, to which Hamid countered: "Bashir did not invite us by name, and we consider ourselves to be the strongest movement with the most influence in the region." JEM's Hamid also stated that the GoS could have easily solved Darfur's problems in 2003 or 2004 if it wanted, but that it has never sought a conclusive solution to the chaos of Darfur. "It will come as no secret if I say that most of the Darfurians are convinced that the government does not want to solve the problem of Darfur before 2011, the end of the interim period," stated Darfur.

¶4. (SBU) JEM Spokesman Ahmed Hussein told poloff on August 5 despite giving Darfur more attention in the press, the GoS has not increased its contact with JEM. Hussein stated that the GoS has not contacted JEM in the last week, and that "there are no new developments despite all of the talk about Darfur." Hussein said that Hamid's interview in Akbar Al-Youm, along with his own efforts, have helped clear up previous misstatements by Al-Faki.

SLM/MM FRUSTRATION AFTER BASHIR MTG.

¶5. (SBU) Also on August 5, Minnawi confidant and senior leader of SLM/MM, Muhammad Tijani, told poloffs that he was "very frustrated" with his personal meeting with President Bashir the week of August

¶27. Tijani delivered a personal letter from Minnawi ("which made all of Minnawi's usual statements about his commitment to the DPA and its lack of implementation by the GoS") to President Bashir. Tijani said that he expected that President Bashir would have "brought something to the table during our meeting, and not just listened to our concerns." Tijani said that Bashir accused SLM/MM of causing most of the insecurity in Darfur, and that he appeared uninformed on many important issues. According to Tijani, there are five to six people around Bashir, who "focus only on security issues, and censor what Bashir actually hears about the region -- it really showed in that meeting." Tijani said that he also discussed the GoS's failure to provide funds to the Darfur Reconstruction and Development Fund, to which Bashir responded that a source of funding from the Chinese government may soon boost the DRDF. Tijani stated that the meeting ended in an unproductive digression into the state of ethnic relations in Darfur. "I was very disappointed with the meeting," noted d Tijani, "At this moment, after all that has happened [with the ICC] I still believe that the GoS is not ready to implement the DPA."

¶16. (U) Also on August 5, Minni Minnawi strongly criticized the NCP leadership in a lengthy interview in "Al-Sahafa." Responding to a question about SLM/MM leaders such as Dr. Rayah Mahmoud "attempting to dethrone him," Minnawi stated that "We are closely following all these things, and they all are created by the NCP and GoS... The SLM Deputy Chairman [i.e. Dr. Rayah Mahmud] and the General Secretary [i.e. Mustafa Tirab] are the main reasons for the breakdown of the DPA and we consider that the NCP sneaked these individuals into the SLM." Minnawi also said, "the Government depends on those who defect from the movement to weaken us... the Government has to respect itself and to follow up with the known mechanisms designed by Abuja." Regarding Bashir's tour of the

KHARTOUM 00001184 002 OF 002

Darfur capitals, Minnawi stated that he did not receive an invitation for the rallies in El-Fasher saying, "I did not know about the event until I heard Bashir speaking in El-Fasher." (Note: Full translated text of this interview will be sent to AF/SPG and the office of the Special Envoy. End Note.)

COMMENT

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¶17. (SBU) As of August 5, Bashir's much-announced Darfur initiative so far appears to be more of a public relations campaign than a genuine attempt to solve the ongoing Darfur crisis. Minnawi and JEM contacts are correct to assert that the initiative lacks detail, substance, and, as some claim, perhaps even a genuine desire to solve the Darfur crisis. JEM's analysis of the GoS's desire to create ongoing instability in Darfur until 2011, SLM/MM's interpretation of Bashir as an aloof leader, and Minnawi's belief in the NCP's attempt to undermine his movement from within, are all troubling. Many observers have speculated that the NCP wants to keep Darfur marginalized until after the elections, since it will obviously not fare well with much of the population there. Even if these rebel perceptions are somewhat distorted, these ideas will continue to hamper efforts at bringing these groups into direct dialogue with the GoS. Embassy has made clear to the senior NCP leadership that the miserable "business as usual" situation in Darfur will never lead to an improvement in relations with the West.

FERNANDEZ